



City of Grand Rapids

City Commission adopts Equal Services Policy

11/15/17: GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – The City Commission has acted to ensure that all city officials respect the rights of and provide equal services to all individuals regardless of immigration status and national origin. The Commission unanimously approved the “Equal Services Regardless of Immigration Status and/or National Origin” City Commission Policy at yesterday’s Committee of the Whole. The rules were also unanimously adopted last Thursday by the Community Relations Commission (CRC).

The policy formalizes the City’s commitment to respecting the rights of and providing equal services to all. The CRC drafted the policy at the request of the mayor and the city manager. Its goal was to ensure that the immigrant population of Grand Rapids was safe and protected.

After researching the issue, a CRC sub-committee engaged citizens and neighbors. It worked with community stakeholders including the City Commission and the ACLU. It also sought the counsel of law enforcement and legal community. After these meetings, the CRC drafted a policy before unanimously adopting the measure.

The policy prohibits public servants from coercing, making improper or unlawful threats of deportation. It also prohibits City representatives from engaging in verbal abuse of any person based on the individual’s or individual’s family members’ actual or perceived immigration status or national origin. The policy specifically cites those public servants being the mayor, city commissioners, city clerk, any member of any City agency, board, commission, appointee, employee or personal services contractors.

“We appreciate the Community Relations Commission’s work on this policy,” Mayor Rosalynn Bliss said. “This policy is aligned with our commitment to being a welcoming and inclusive city.”

The Equal Services declaration ensures the enforcement of rights under the U.S. Constitution, including due process and equal protection. It does not put the City at risk for losing federal funding.

“I applaud the City Commission, CRC and the City of Grand Rapids for acting to protect the dignity, safety and health of all members of our community regardless of immigration status or national origin,” said CRC Chair Tommy Allen. “The immigrant community is a very vulnerable population that has not felt safe coming forward. That’s why we worked with lawyers representing the immigrant community to have these important voices heard. Now that the City has this policy in writing, it does reassure residents that city employees, including police officers, are here to serve and protect. They know now that, if needed, they can call on and



City of Grand Rapids

trust in somebody in uniform. They can be assured that our employees will be there to serve and won't violate their rights," he said.

Adoption of this policy follows many other actions by the City to ensure Grand Rapids remains a welcoming and inclusive community where all residents feel safe. Officials believe a welcoming and inclusive community creates a more vibrant culture, a stronger community in which each person has an opportunity to contribute to, more jobs created by immigrant entrepreneurs and a thriving economy that benefits everyone.

Chief David Rahinsky says he hopes the Commission's action today helps to advance and strengthen the bond between the community and police department. The policy aligns and enhances the Grand Rapids Police Department's Impartial Policing Policy. The GRPD adopted that policy earlier this year.

"What I hope residents of this community take from today's action, is that if they need law enforcement assistance from the Grand Rapids Police Department, regardless of their status, is that they are not reluctant to reach out to us," Chief Rahinsky said. "If someone is a victim of a crime, they need to have confidence and feel comfortable calling 911 so that Grand Rapids police officers can respond and assist. I hope this reinforces to our residents where the priorities of the GRPD lie."

While the City will conduct business under this new Equal Services Policy, City officials remind residents that this policy only applies to the City of Grand Rapids. Although all serve and operate within the City, Kent County, State of Michigan and Federal agencies are not subject to this policy.

About the Community Relations Commission

Since 1953, the nine-member Community Relations Commission (CRC) has worked to develop a mutual understanding among all without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, marital status, disability, source of lawful income, sexual orientation or gender identity. The CRC is an advisory, operational and quasi-judicial body to the City Commission.

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